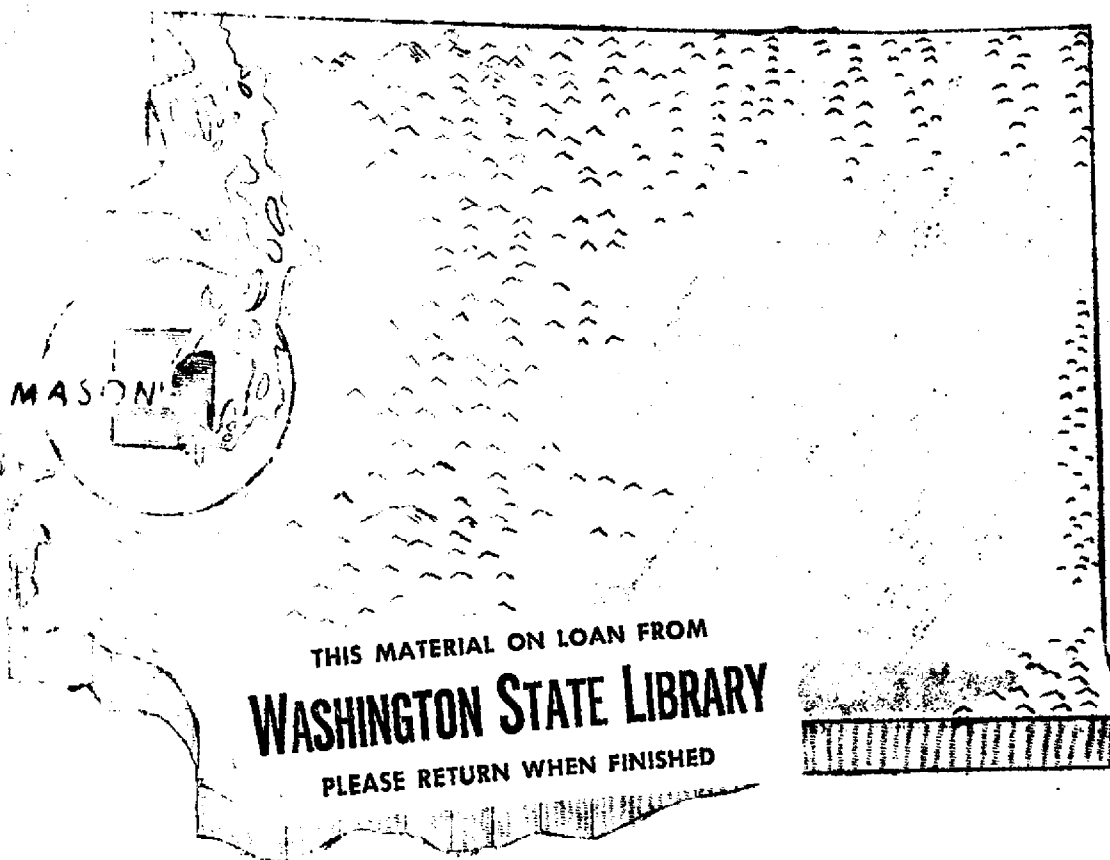


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# MASON COUNTY AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON

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COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES  
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## PART I

## History of Mason County Agriculture

Introduction

Mason County is made up of Puget Sound inlets, river valleys and forested foothills of the Olympic Mountains. Located in central western Washington, its history and economic development have been closely related to the settlement of tidewater areas on Puget Sound and Hood Canal where logging and lumbering have been principal industries. Playing a lesser historical role, agriculture was developed in localized areas, mainly on a general and part-time farming basis. Recently there has been some specialization in dairying, vineyard growing and farm woodland products.

Mason is one of the early established counties of the state, being created in 1854. It was named in honor of Charles H. Mason, first Secretary of the Washington Territorial Government. Shelton, a city of 5,700, is the county seat. The county area of 967 square miles is relatively small, ranking twenty-ninth in area among the thirty-nine counties of Washington. Its population of 15,022 in 1950 ranked twenty-fourth.

Mason County agriculture is primarily of the dairy and general livestock type with some specialty crops. Compared with other Washington counties, the value of farm products sold is relatively low, being about \$761,000 during the Census year of 1954. Dairy products accounted for nearly \$296,000 of this amount. In recent years the county has been noted for tree farming and farm forestry. The most recent Census on farm sales of saw logs, pulpwood and other wood products showed Mason County ranking thirteenth in the state with sales of \$157,400 for 1954. The Census did not enumerate the harvesting and marketing of Christmas trees and forest decorative greens, a valuable industry in which Mason County is among the leading five counties of the state.

History 1/

Before the settlement of white men, present Mason County was occupied by village groups of Skokomish, Squaxon and Nisqually Indians. They were canoe Indians who lived primarily by fishing in Puget Sound. They also hunted deer

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and rabbits and gathered shell fish and roots and berries from the shorelines and heavily forested islands and nearby mountains. The surroundings of abundant fisheries, forests and tidal marshlands yielded abundant food and Indians had leisure time to build permanent settlements on the Skokomish River and the beaches of Hood Canal and Harstene Island 2/. Prior to contact with white traders and missionaries there was no agriculture practiced by the Indians.

The present Mason County area was explored first by the British expedition of Captain George Vancouver in the spring of 1792. Hood Canal was explored and the expedition named it after Lord Hood of the British Government and Navy. American exploration was not made until 1841 when the Wilkes Expedition of the U. S. Navy surveyed and charted inlets and islands in southern Puget Sound. Wilkes named Case Inlet and Harstene Island after officers in his expedition.

Western civilization began in Mason County during the British period of fur trading in the southern Puget Sound Basin. Fort Nisqually, a trading post near Steilacoom in present Pierce County, was established in 1833 by the Hudson Bay Company. It was a point of trading contact for Indians and a base from which trappers and traders visited the wilderness area in what is now Mason County. Missionaries from Nisqually also visited Indian villages on the shorelines of this area. Little or no agriculture was practiced in Mason County prior to 1850.

Early settlement by Americans in the Mason County area was held back by uncertainties of land title and lack of security from Indian hostilities. The Puget Sound area was under joint jurisdiction of the United States and Great Britain between 1819 and 1846. Not until after the treaty of 1846, which established the present Canadian border, were the lands of Mason County open fully

3/ Material used in this historical summary has been obtained from the following authors and publications:

- (1) Richard M. Perry, "The Counties of Washington" (Mason County), Secretary of State, Belle Reeves, Olympia, Wash. (Mimeographed) 1943.
- (2) Lucile McDonald, Diaries of John Campbell, Early Mason County Settler, Published in series of articles in Seattle Sunday Times Magazine, Seattle Times, Seattle, July and August issues, 1958.
- (3) Washington State Association of County Commissioners and Engineers, 1953 Yearbook, The Book of the Counties. Published in cooperation with the State College of Washington, Pullman.
- (4) Washington, A Guide to the Evergreen State, American Guide Series. Compiled by the Federal Writers' Project, W.P.A. Published by the Washington State Historical Society, Binfords & Mort, Portland, Oregon, 1941. See pages 539-543.

- 2/ The proper name of the island which has been placed on some maps as Harstene and on others as Harstine was ruled in 1941 by the National Board on Geographic Names to be Harstene. The Board's decision was based on research finding that the United States Navy Wilkes Expedition of 1841 in the Puget Sound region named the island in honor of Lt. Henry J. Harstene. Early map makers used a misspelled version of Lt. Harstene's name and the name Harstine was in common usage before the recent official ruling.

for American settlement. About the time Americans began coming overland to settle in the Puget Sound area Indian hostility in Washington Territory was a factor which limited expansion northward from Olympia. Land settlers in outlying areas retreated to forts and tidewater settlements in 1855 and 1856 for security following Indian attacks in the Seattle, Steilacoom and White River districts.

Governor Isaac Stevens of Washington Territory negotiated a series of Indian Treaties between 1854 and 1858 which eased the threats to isolated settlements. In respect to Mason County, treaties with the Squaxon and Skokomish led to later establishment of two reservations and opened areas on the western shores of Puget Sound for American pioneers seeking timber and land.

Early American settlement began on Hammersley and Skookum Inlets in southeastern Mason County between 1855 and 1865. Among the first pioneers who made claims under the Donation Land Act and homestead laws were the following: John Campbell, W. W. Miller, A. M. Van Horn, William Krise, Christopher C. Simmons, P. F. Kennedy and F. M. Simmons, all in the Kamilche district on Skookum Creek. Logging and lumbering settlements were started on Hammersley Inlet in 1853 by David Shelton, a settler for whom the city of Shelton was named. Mike Taylor operated logging camps on the shorelines of the inlets. Thomas Webb was an early settler in the Skokomish Valley. Robert Jarrell founded a logging camp and took up land on Harstene Island. Pioneer settlers on Harstene Island in the 1870's were Jacob Wingert, George Wells and T. F. McElroy.

Diaries of two early settlers describe agriculture of the 1860-1880 period. Most land settlers were preoccupied with logging. General farming was a part-time activity. Land clearing was difficult and discouraged the growing of field crops. Hay and potatoes were principal crops. Livestock, hay for logging oxen, eggs, berries, potatoes and vegetables were sold to local logging camps. All farms had large gardens for home use. Marketing to Olympia and other shoreline settlements was mainly by boat. Cattle were driven over trails to Olympia.

By 1854 there were about 100 persons living on the inlets of present Mason County. Because of isolation from Olympia and other Puget Sound settlements a pioneers' petition for county status was enacted into law by the Territorial Legislature establishing Sawamish County with a county seat at Oakland on Hammersley Inlet. In 1864 the Legislature changed the name to Mason County and in 1888 the county seat was established at Shelton, the largest lumber town on Hammersley Inlet.

During the 1880's, Mason County began growing in population as its logging industry expanded. As more logging camps and mills were established on Hood Canal at Eldon, Lilliwaup, Hoodsport, Dewatto and Union, on Hammersley and Case Inlets at Shelton and Allyn, the population rose from about 640 in the Census of 1880 to 3,800 by 1900. A report in 1876 showed there were 50 logging camps on Hood Canal.

After 1900 roads were improved and major investments in lumbering were made at Shelton. Mason County's forest lands became a primary source of logs rafted to Olympia, Tacoma, Port Gamble and Seattle. Employment in logging and

forest products manufacturing supported total payrolls of over 2,000 men by 1930. Many of these workers bought out over land at cheap rates and took up permanent residence.

While agriculture had a minor and secondary position in the economic development of Mason County, it also was expanded between 1880 and 1930. Dairying was developed as a specialty in the Kamilche district and the Skokomish Valley. Dairy herd improvement added to production. New roads and faster truck access to Olympia encouraged dairying. Some specialty vineyard and berry growing was developed on Harstene Island and on the shores of Case Inlet at Grapeview. The Island Bailie grape growing industry had its beginnings in 1878 at Grapeview. Walter Echert, pioneer at Grapeview, is credited as being the first grape grower in this district. Some commercial loganberry growing was started as early as 1918 by W. A. Hitchcock on Harstene Island. General farmers and those who grew cash crops of vegetables and berries developed local markets at lumber towns and logging camps. Hay and feed grains sold to feed oxen and horses used in logging were important trade items prior to 1920.

From 1930 to 1955 Mason County's agriculture and general economy grew steadily. Population increased from 10,000 to over 15,000 in this period. Industrial activity at Shelton in lumber, pulp and other forest products increased. Oyster culture which was pioneered in this area supported more families. More cut-over land was developed into livestock farms. A major factor of growth was the development of tourist resorts and the establishment of summer and retirement homes on the shoreline of Puget Sound and Hood Canal. With good highway access and improved cross-sound ferry service, tourists and country home residence increased greatly after 1945. A highly important industry in Christmas trees and other minor forest products added to farm income.

Mason County agriculture has been guided by several agencies and private associations. The Washington State College Experiment Station at Pullman has provided technical information related to dairying, poultry raising and berry growing. Assistance and guidance has been provided by the U. S. Department of Agriculture and State College Extension Service through County Agents located in Shelton. Several private groups have worked for improvement of production and marketing of the county's farm output. These include the Thurston-Mason Dairy Herd Improvement Association, the Thurston-Mason Jersey Club, the Washington Cooperative Farmers Association and the Western Washington Farm Forestry Association. In addition to group work there have been individuals too numerous to cite who have influenced farming in the area through their ideas and demonstrations of specialized agriculture.

Since 1955 the county has continued to expand its agricultural base. The Washington State College Experiment Station at Pullman has provided technical information related to dairying, poultry raising and berry growing. Assistance and guidance has been provided by the U. S. Department of Agriculture and State College Extension Service through County Agents located in Shelton. Several private groups have worked for improvement of production and marketing of the county's farm output. These include the Thurston-Mason Dairy Herd Improvement Association, the Thurston-Mason Jersey Club, the Washington Cooperative Farmers Association and the Western Washington Farm Forestry Association. In addition to group work there have been individuals too numerous to cite who have influenced farming in the area through their ideas and demonstrations of specialized agriculture.

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